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Some text and illustrations are lost through tight binding. This is a problem which we regret we have found unavoidable since we are only filming at the Victoria and Albert Museum those catalogues that cannot be found in other London locations.

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HENRI LAURENS

CURT VALENTIN GALLERY

FORMERLY BUCHHOLZ GALLERY

32 EAST 57 STREET · NEW YORK 22

HENRI

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LAURENS

June 7, 1952

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

HENRI LAURENS was born in Paris on February 18, 1885. After finishing public school, he worked as an apprentice to a sculptor-decorator, and later as an ornamental stonemason. He went to night school, drawing in life classes and doing naturalist sketching and modelling. He was self-taught in the art of sculpture.

In 1911, he began his experiments, moved by the same spirit as the Cubist painters of his generation: Picasso, Braque, Leger, and Gris.—At that time he did not belong to any single group.

In 1916, Henri Laurens attended the meetings in the Rue Huyghens, which were organized by the "Revue Nord-Sud," directed by Pierre Reverdy. The Cubist artists met there for literary gatherings with Max Jacob, and for musical gatherings with Erik Satie and the "Groupe des Six."

From 1911 to 1921, Henri Laurens produced collages, constructions, and polychrome stone works. Then, after this Cubist discipline, he returned to a more direct contact with natural forms.

Retrospective exhibitions of Laurens' work were held at the Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, in 1949 and at the Musee National d'Art Moderne, Paris, in 1951.

The first comprehensive exhibitions of Laurens' work in New York were held by the Brummer Gallery in 1938 and the Buchholz Gallery (Curt Valentin) in 1947.

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INTRODUCTION

HENRI LAURENS is as taciturn as his art; it is impossible to wrest from either of them the confidence of a theory, or of what people call an explanation. Laurens' sculptures are thus silent, self-contained, strong in their simple appearance in space, stripped of those justifications which are employed in an attempt to hound the avatars of an object of the external world to its final deformation. They are not deformation, but creation. They are pure plastic. They are related to Cubism in that Cubism, too, requires extreme severity; which is to say, this is not a new manner of employing art, but a new employment, even an art, a distinct art. Not a school of art, but an art in itself.

Each element of this new vocabulary is independent and contributes to works which will themselves constitute entities as isolated and singular as possible. The strictest analytical spirit rules here. It inspires the dissection of the elements used and should be discernible in the very character of the construction finally obtained. And this is precisely the reason that this art is so massively mute. Its creator banished all discursive facility—this manner of speaking, this eloquence, this rhetoric which is modelling and through which, at the

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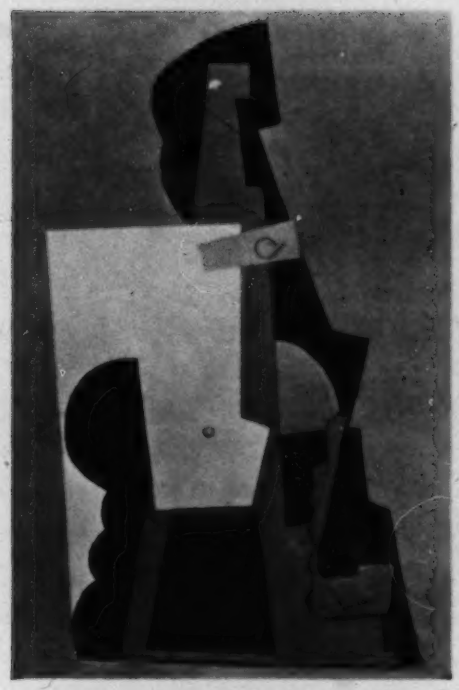
tip of nimble and mischievous fingers, a known and endlessly recognizable object turns, turns back again, swerves, is lengthened or shortened, fills space or contracts—in short, goes through the most diverting of antics. But here, considered and voluntary forms, separate from all contact, already made and completely made, assemble as a monument no less secret than its integers; whose increasing force and ultimate intactness will stay protected from any indiscreet interrogation.

This art does not invite interrogation, but proof. Proof of things which are, not of images and representations, but of equilibria, of powers, often even of graces, the presence of which cannot be contradicted. They draw attention to themselves with unquestionable majesty and nobility, and they bear witness to the purity of heart and spirit with which they were conceived and brought to their fullness, that is, to their perfection. In addition, there is no arrogance in the suddenness of this perfection but, on the contrary, pride, by which I mean those virtues of proud humility and proud serenity which are the honor of the great French masters. Laurens, the upright and candid spirit, the patient artisan, belongs to that group. He has exercised his style in collages, drawings, and graphic works, a field in which he has produced masterpieces and in which he has also exerted his desire for reflexion and simplification, if not, in short, his intent, his will. He has kept a strict and exclusive relationship with his materials, listening to what they have to teach him, striving only for the ways and means by which he might succeed in obtaining from them the purest figure, that one for which there would be nothing to say (the most silent art being also the art which requires silence). But in this silence there has been, for many years, an affirmation and a fervor which Laurens' modesty could doubtless not perceive, and which mark him, as I have said, as a great French creator, the very type of the creator, in the most strict and certain authenticity.

—Jean CASSOU

Director of the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris



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STATEMENT by LAURENS

ESSENTIALLY *sculpture means taking possession of a space, the construction of an object by means of hollows and volumes, fulnesses and voids; their alternation, their contrasts, their constant and reciprocal tension, and in final form, their equilibrium.*

The relative success of the work and the happy solution of its particular problem correspond to the intensity of this composition of forms. It should be static despite its movement when space radiates and forms about it. I have done polychrome sculpture; I wanted to do away with variations of light and, by means of color, to fix once and for all the relationship of the components, so that a red volume remains red regardless of the light. For me, polychrome is the interior light of the sculpture.

With non-polychrome sculpture, I believe there is no need to think about the effects of light. When forms arrive at their maturity,

their fulness, light will fall on them of its own accord, just as it falls on a ripe piece of fruit in a garden. The sculptured work has its intrinsic space: the space it occupies, and the space which depends on it, radiating from it, an indispensable part of the work. That is to say, it should not be stifled or lost in its surroundings.

Sculpture (but no more than any other work of art) is not made for museums. Arranging expositions in the open air, like the one at Antwerp, for example, is only a compromise, but it is at least a progressive step. There the sculptor can place his work with greater freedom: a group of trees, the green expanse of a lawn, or the curve of a garden path may aid in the presentation of sculpture; but an open-air museum is still a museum, and sculptures are not made to be exposed as samples of the sculptors' savoir-faire.

Sculpture has its place in the moments through which it participates in the life of man. It is the natural ally of architecture and has always been during the great epochs. A Roman Christ or an Angkor dancer had a normal purpose. This usage of sculpture should be reconciled with the principle which I consider essential: the total occupation of space in three dimensions, with all the faces of the sculpture having an equal and self-same importance, and perhaps a new assimilation of architecture.

This will be the task of the young sculptors. We others who derive from the Cubist period are entirely devoted to inquiries, to experiments, to their slow development, and we cannot spend time on their applications. The time was not yet ripe for us, and architects wanted only to obtain perfect severity—their revenge on the excesses of 19th Century style. They were not disposed to any discreditable collaboration. But I think that in the future, because of the work accomplished by their elders, sculptors and architects will discover the conditions for a new alliance.

HENRI LAURENS

From *XX^e siècle* No. 2. January 1952

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CATALOGUE

1 *Man with Clarinet*
1919. Stone. H.24"

2 *Woman with Fruit Basket*
1920. Terracotta. H.14½"

3 *Guitar*
1920. Terracotta. H.14½"

4 *Woman with Bird*
1922. Terracotta. H.13½"

5 *Reclining Nude*
1922. Bronze relief
23 x 63½"

6 *Reclining Nude*
1927. Alabaster. H.6" L.12½"

7 *Kneeling Nude*
1927. Alabaster. H.14½"

8 *Still Life with Guitar*
1928. Terracotta
12¾ x 17½"

9 *Kneeling Nude*
1929. Bronze. H.14"

10 *Reclining Nude*
1929. Bronze. H.5" L.16"

LIBRARY

11 *Reclining Nude*

1930. Bronze. H.10½" L.33"

12 *Seated Nude*

1930. Stone. H.18"

13 *Undines*

1932. Bronze. H.7½" L.15½"

14 *Seated Nude*

1935. Bronze. H.24"

15 *Amphion*

1937. Bronze. H.21½"

16 *Siren*

1937. Bronze. H.10"

17 *Siren with Raised Arms*

1938. Bronze. H.7" L.15"

18 *Winged Siren*

1938. Bronze. H.23½"

19 *Sirens*

1938. Bronze. H.14"

20 *Little Fishwife*

1939. Bronze. H.12"

21 *Metamorphosis*

1940. Bronze. H.4" L.9"

22 *Siren*

1945. Bronze. H.45¼"

23 *Nude Arranging Her Hair*

1946. Bronze. H.13⅛"

24 *Bather*

1946. Bronze. H.12½"

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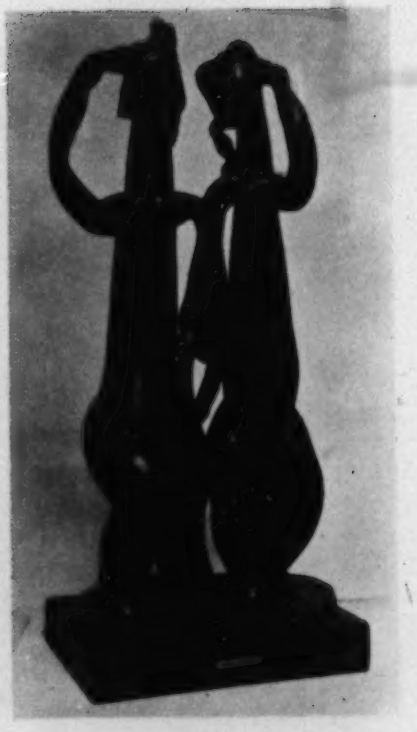

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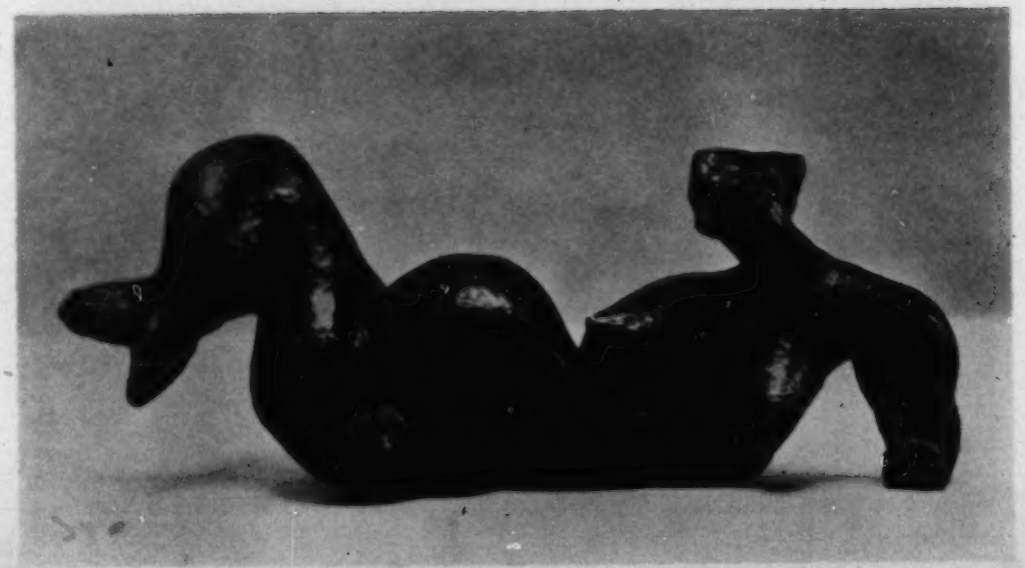

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25 *Archangel*

1946. Bronze. H.3" L.6"

26 *Autumn*

1948. Bronze. H.9½" L.20"

27 *Luna*

1948. Marble. H.35¾"

28 *Study for Luna*

1948. Bronze. H.13"

29 *Reclining Nude*

1949. Bronze. H.4" L.11"

30 *Young Girl*

1950. Bronze. H.15⅛"

31 *Sisters*

1950. Bronze. H.35"

32 *Siren*

1950. Bronze. H.9"

33 *Siren*

1950. Bronze. H.23"

34 *Aurora*

1950. Marble. H.19"

35 *Young Girl*

1951. Bronze. H.12"

36 *Repose*

1951. Bronze. H.4" L.9½"

COLLAGES

37 *Seated Woman*

1918. 39 x 26½"

38 *Guitar on a Table*

1918. 20 x 25"

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67 Lucien *Dialogues*

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